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Foreign Policy Days

An external strategy for Spain (October 28, 2021)¹

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Introduction

The first day of the event 'A foreign strategy for Spain' was held on October 28, 2021 at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, organised by the Centre for International Security together with the Libertas, Veritas et Legalitas Forum. This series of conferences has received a grant for the study, analysis and implementation of the priorities of Spanish foreign policy from the Secretary of State for Global Spain of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This first session analysed Spanish foreign policy, its interests and limitations, and the role played by our country in the regional and global panorama.

The conference was organised around a round table discussion, with the participation of three high-level speakers: Nicolás Pascual de la Parte, Ambassador-at-Large for Hybrid Threats and Cybersecurity; Javier Rupérez, Ambassador of Spain and member of the Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences; and Antonio Caño, journalist and former director of the newspaper El País; moderated by Ignacio Cosidó, Director of the Centre for International Security at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria. The conference took place in a context marked by the changes and transformations that are occurring in the world at the present time, in which numerous countries are repositioning

¹ This analysis brings together the conclusions of the first of the two foreign policy conferences entitled 'A foreign strategy for Spain', which were organised by the International Security Centre of the Francisco de Vitoria University's Institute of International Politics, in collaboration with the Libertas, Veritas et Legalitas Forum, on 28 October and 15 November 2021. This collection of publications, as well as the conferences on foreign policy, received a grant from the Secretariat of State for Global Spain of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation.

themselves on the international stage —and the consequent need for Spain to do the same—, as Ignacio Cosidó indicated in his presentation of the round table.

As reflected in the Global Presence Index prepared by the Elcano Royal Institute, taking into account the Spanish economic, military and soft presence —also known as soft power—, our country was ranked 13th in the world for the year 2020. It is precisely in this last dimension that Spain stands out the most (11th place), especially in the area of tourism, although the other two dimensions are not too far behind in the ranking (12th and 14th places, respectively).² A foreign strategy for Spain —certainly a desirable one— would involve improving those areas in which the country is less robust and reinforcing those in which it stands out above others, without neglecting the realism required to define objectives that can actually be achieved.

Spain's foreign policy must be strategic, autonomous and bilateral³

During his speech, Ambassador Pascual de la Parte stressed the need to conceive foreign policy as a strategic issue, not as an attempt to project ideologies outwards, but rather as an operational concept. It is essential that it be of practical use to foreign policy actors, who represent Spain abroad, and it must obviously be a matter of state, far removed from political tactics and spurious interests. If there is ever a time to demonstrate a vision of state, it is in foreign policy.

Spanish foreign policy must have an autonomous character, since Spain is a middle power with global aspirations. We must defend our principles and interests, cooperate and collaborate with allies in the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and other organisations to multiply our strength and projection abroad. Participation in the various international organisations cannot be seen as excluding the establishment of bilateral relations with the countries that we consider to be priorities in achieving our objectives, rather the opposite: strengthening these bilateral relations can contribute to the achievement of the objectives we share in the international organisations to which we belong. Moreover, this is something that all countries do and which we have been keeping in a certain dry dock for some time, which is not appropriate. If we strengthen our bilateral relationship with the United States, France or Morocco, we should run counter to the common interests we have with the other countries that are part of the European Union or NATO; nevertheless, the strengthening itself would be of great interest to our foreign policy.

We are not in an era of change, but in a change of era: the era of the collapse of the post-World War II liberal democratic order that once had the United Nations at its centre. If anything, Fukuyama was wrong when he asserted the End of History back in

² Elcano Global Presence Index, Spain.

<https://explora.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/es/country/iepg/global/ES/ES/2020>

³ Main arguments extracted from Ambassador Pascual de la Parte's speech during the conference on foreign policy for Spain. To see his full speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTUieWAvEoo>.

1992. His thesis was that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the hegemony of liberal democracy would eventually spread around the world. Thirty years later, we find ourselves with a completely different panorama in which, now, the profiles are not defined. "The old has not yet died, and the new has not yet been born", said Ambassador Pascual de la Parte. We no longer live in a world of blocs, we live in a multipolar world in which countries are continually emerging with ambitions to be major players, applying dynamics of influence and strength, thus shaping the new world order, depending on the distribution of power. China, India, Turkey, Russia, Arab countries, among others. We want effective multilateralism, which depends mainly on the great powers.

Following the 1978 Constitution, Spain opted for a model of coexistence that integrated into its nature as a nation a Social, Democratic and Rule of Law State, assuming the principles of a liberal and Western democracy. In order to be consistent with this spirit, it has to commit to trends in favour of the free market, the free movement of goods and services, and an economy open to the world, increasing the weight of the foreign sector in GDP, which currently stands at 70%. But Spain is also geographically in a delicate geostrategic position. It is the southern border of the European Union facing an area as unstable as the Maghreb-Sahel. This situation obliges us to guarantee and reinforce our strategic sovereignty in defence matters.

In the Spanish Foreign Ministry, and in general throughout our diplomatic corps, it is well known that the priorities of our foreign policy are simple, as they arise from our idiosyncrasy, our particular geographical situation, our history and our culture, and this means that these priorities have been significantly static since the time of the Catholic Monarchs. The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset once said "Spain's destiny is Europe". Our historical vocation is Latin America, and our projection is in the Mediterranean. Our geographical position marks our mission in the area of security: in the event of conflict, we must maintain the Canary Islands-Gibraltar-Balearic Islands maritime and air axis, which is Spain's responsibility until we receive help from the allies. However, returning to the idea of the current global change of era, it should be noted that the world's axis has changed. If since the discovery of America this axis was located in the Atlantic Ocean, today it has shifted to the Pacific Ocean; and proof of this is the change in the strategy of the United States, which has been prioritising its interests in the Pacific over those it might have had a few decades ago in the Atlantic. This is the first time in the history of the last 2,000 years that Spain is not adjacent to the axis of the world, which will force us to demonstrate our added value in transatlantic relations.

If we stated earlier how necessary it is for the autonomy of our foreign policy to enable us, as something good and necessary, to have bilateral relations with other countries that may or may not form part of the international organisations to which we belong, this takes on special importance when we analyse the role that we as a country should

play in Europe. For some time now, we have been reluctant to exercise this right of autonomy in our foreign policy by letting ourselves go and not being active, as a Member State, in pursuing our own foreign policy, this being undoubtedly coherent and reliable with all our partners. We should enhance bilateral relations with those countries that are part of the European Union that are most likely to be of interest to us, because they do too. For different policies we keep hearing about multiple axes that are emerging within the Union itself —the classic example being the Franco-German axis— without Spain becoming part of any of them. Our strategic autonomy within Europe must be compatible with the establishment of links with member countries and also with external countries; among them, the United States, which as a hegemonic power —for the time being— should be a priority for us.

Another strategic line of our foreign policy that we are obliged to consider for historical reasons is Latin America. Both Spain's historical responsibility and interests there are evident, and we should therefore promote a much greater presence than we currently have, and which we enjoyed not so long ago. On the other hand, Spain's presence in Latin America should serve to contribute positively to the resolution of the conflicts that are taking place in the continent, favouring regional integration and economic exchanges. And if Latin America cannot be left aside, neither can Spain ignore its relations with the countries of North Africa. We are, as we have been popularly called, "Europe's southern border", as we are much closer to Africa than to most European countries. Medium- and long-term investment in the African continent is necessary if we take into account threats such as jihadist terrorism and irregular migration. The Mediterranean environment is not stable, and Spain needs to understand that if Africa is not safe and prosperous, neither will we be.

Another worrying factor in current international relations is Russia's attitude and interests. Spain, as part of the European Union, should support and promote a strategy that goes beyond the economic sanctions and critical dialogue that has been adopted so far against the Russian power. We should ask ourselves, as Spain and as Europe, what we really want *vis-à-vis* Russia, whether we want to contain, isolate or negotiate with a neighbour that has demonstrated great geopolitical weight. Likewise, and bearing in mind that the global strategic centre of gravity has shifted to Asia, Spain has to be present if it does not want to see its international relevance reduced. Spain's strategy should be to participate in the large markets that are developing on the Asian continent, as well as to contribute to regional pacification strategies in order to provide the region with greater stability. And we will have to do all this hand in hand with the United States because, in this area of foreign policy, we must recognise our dependence on Washington.

Spain ought to understand its current position in the world: the position of a middle power with global interests. We have to identify our objectives and goals, design our policies to achieve them, and determine what human and structural resources we will

need to carry them out. Taking up the idea that foreign policy should be a State Policy, consensus among the different political forces is mandatory, separating it as far as possible from the policies of the governments of the moment and their trends, and giving it a certain permanence over time. The reason is simple: our foreign policy depends mainly on our geostrategic position, and this factor has little to do with political conjunctures of one or another sign.

A country's domestic and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin ⁴

Ambassador Javier Rupérez began his speech by stressing the need to understand that domestic and foreign policy are two sides of the same coin, the latter being dependent on the former. If domestic policy reflects a conforming and cohesive society with political and constitutional approaches, respectful of the principles of the national and international legal order, in a thriving economic context, then we can have a foreign policy worthy of such a name. A country does not have the foreign policy it wants, but the one it can have; to demonstrate this we only have to look back and see how it varies over time. In the case of Spain, the isolationism during the decades of Franco's dictatorship is not comparable to the subsequent openness promoted during the transition to democracy. Undoubtedly, the internal situation has marked —and continues to mark— Spain's projection abroad.

Both Ambassador Rupérez and Ambassador Pascual de la Parte agreed on the differences and complementarities between the bilateral and multilateral spheres. Since the Transition, Spain has relied on two multilateral instruments to conduct its foreign policy: the European Union and NATO, the two major projects that have contributed to Spain's integration into its political, economic and security environment, and which are undoubtedly the basis on which Spain's foreign policy is articulated. This should not prevent us from developing closer bilateral relations with some of the EU and NATO countries, as some of its member states have done. We only have to look, for example, at the specific relations of certain countries such as Germany or the countries of Eastern Europe. The European Union and NATO reflect the fundamentals of our external membership; but this should not be an excuse for not developing a bilateral policy. Spain must strengthen its multilateral sphere and, at the same time, build a bilateral one, which would contribute to diminishing the perception of a certain passivity that we are often accused of in both organisations.

Ambassador Rupérez stressed the importance of security in foreign policy, putting forward the idea that the latter cannot prosper without the former, accompanied by an effective defence policy. In the Spanish case, talking about defence is sometimes unpopular: in terms of defence, spending is rarely perceived as an investment, limiting the resources allocated to sectors that are more popular with the public, such as

⁴ Main arguments extracted from Ambassador Rupérez's speech during the conference on Spain's foreign policy. To see his full speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTUieWAVeoo>

education, health or infrastructure, and it can be forgotten that it is the armed forces that defend our national interests, if necessary, through the eventual use of weapons. They constitute our deterrent capacity in the face of the multiplicity of actors that make up the current global landscape, and who do not necessarily share our principles and values. What is clear is that Spain invests less than the 2% of national GDP demanded by NATO in defence, making us a member of the group of countries that the United States has described as "free riders", of not providing sufficient resources but taking advantage of the umbrella of collective defence.

In short, Spain must know where it stands geopolitically, what role it plays on the international stage and what interests it wants to protect —multilateral rules, respect for human rights and freedoms, democracy, market economy—, because without these three aspects it is very difficult to achieve the foreign policy that we want and must build, and even more so to put it into practice in a context of constant change. Ambassador Pascual de la Parte stated that this change is reflected in how far we are from the world that in 1945 relied on the United Nations to put an end to two world wars; but also from the world of 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, from the world of 1991 when the Soviet Union disappeared, or from the world of 2001 after the 9/11 attacks against the World Trade Centre. Ambassador Rupérez understands that, despite all these changes, the world of liberal international conventions has not disappeared, perhaps out of a personal desire to keep alive the image of the international consensus that has managed to prevent the outbreak of a third world war. Reflecting on the current world order, Ignacio Cosidó asked whether the liberal international order has become obsolete, whether it is still sustainable today, or whether it can emerge from the current crisis even stronger.

In February 2020, before the coronavirus crisis, the annual Munich Security Conference was held, in which the concept of "Westlessness" was introduced. Is the world becoming less Western? Is the West becoming less Western as well? What does it mean for the world if the West leaves the stage to other actors? What might a joint Western strategy for an era of great power competition look like?⁵ These are some of the questions raised in the report on which the debate at the Munich Security Conference was based. At this year's conference, the concept of "Beyond Westlessness" was put on the table. The latter conference outlined the complexities of navigating in an environment of both competition and cooperation: the West will have to compete against the illiberal tide when it must —to defend its core values and interests— and cooperate with challengers when they can —to address shared risks

⁵ The Munich Security Report is an annual document that serves as a conceptual reference framework for the Munich Security Conference, one of the most important events on the international security agenda, which took place from 14 to 16 February 2020 in the German city.

<https://www.dsn.gob.es/eu/actualidad/sala-prensa/munich-security-report-2020>. To read the full report: <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2020/>

and threats—.⁶ This conception of the environment might be the most accurate for reading the debate on the international liberal order and the one that probably best defines some of the most important challenges for the West and the rest of the world.

Spain has lost conviction in its own national project ⁷

The last speaker at the round table was journalist Antonio Caño, who after decades of dedication to international journalism believes it is appropriate to highlight, first of all, the significant lack of international knowledge about Spain, as foreign citizens and media limit their understanding of Spain to superficial clichés. This fact, in his opinion, was clearly seen with the Catalan crisis of 2017 and the treatment given to this crisis by the international media. On the other hand, Caño considers that those who represent Spain abroad often manage to highlight the country regardless of the scarce resources they often have, pointing out that the difficulty of Spanish foreign policy does not necessarily lie in its execution but in its strategy. If Spain wants to have a proper "foreign policy", it is necessary to define clear objectives and goals, instrumentalise the means and mobilise the resources to achieve them. Spain, however, "tackles foreign policy problems" in a somewhat more improvised manner. The decisions that have been taken in relation to countries such as Morocco, Cuba and the United States in recent months have been treated by public opinion as if the common denominator of all Spanish strategies and policies was such improvisation.

Contradictory as it may seem, globalisation has made countries more defensive, willing to protect themselves more, and paying more attention to their internal problems. In the case of Spain, for example, its absence in the world is worrying; but its absence in Latin America is alarming. This calls into question our foreign policy and our idea of ourselves as a nation: if we are unable to understand the need for a Spanish political, cultural and emotional presence in Latin America, then we do not understand who we are. The current situation contrasts with the period of the Transition, when the world felt admiration for the change in Spain and this was demonstrated by international recognition. In fact, Spain became an example for many countries —especially in Latin America— that followed in its footsteps to end dictatorial regimes and implement democracy. Spain provided aid, means and support to back these countries because it considered it its obligation to do so; a good example of this was the Chilean case. For Caño, "once democracy had been achieved in Spain, the next step was to accompany other countries on the road to democracy", as well as to contribute to disarmament processes or national agreements, as it was done in Central America. An example of Spain's international leadership in the world was the holding of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe between 1980 and 1983, in which major European security issues were debated in Madrid; and the first Arab-Israeli summit, also held in

⁶ Munich Security Report 2021. *Between States of Matter – Competition and Cooperation* <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2021/>

⁷ Main arguments extracted from the intervention of journalist Antonio Caño during the conference on foreign policy for Spain. To see his full speech: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTUieWAVeoo>

the Spanish capital, in 1991. With respect to Cuba, the international community did not conceive that decisions could be taken without considering the Spanish opinion on the country, decisions that had the approval of the United States, aware of the relevance of the Spanish perspective. Foreign policy transcended the ideologies of the moment, and the ideologies of other countries. Javier Solana, for example, was Secretary General of NATO from 1995 to 1999; Spain was so trusted that a Spanish Socialist politician and diplomat, who had previously opposed Spain's entry into the Alliance, was given such a position of responsibility.

The key question Antonio Caño asked himself was what has happened since then. In his opinion, Spain has lost conviction in its own national project, and when there is no faith in oneself it is difficult to expose oneself to being observed abroad and to having a presence abroad. He pointed out that some Spaniards are afraid to recognise themselves —or directly do not recognise themselves— in the word Spain, exposing a fragile and questioned image of our country through which it is difficult to develop a Spanish foreign policy. Caño agrees with Ambassador Rupérez on this point: when the national and domestic spheres fail, the international and foreign spheres fail.

Once the three speakers had finished their interventions, one of the questions put to Antonio Caño from the audience was about the Spanish public's interest in international affairs, in our foreign policy. The journalist highlighted the responsibility of public opinion, which feeds back on the lack of interest of Spaniards in foreign policy: given that Spaniards are not interested in what happens outside their borders, the media devote less time to analysing it. Caño stated that Spaniards are more interested in what happens in Seville than what happens in Libya, although what happens in Libya probably has a greater impact on Spain. The aim of this conference on foreign policy was precisely to raise awareness of the importance of our foreign policy and the repercussions it has on our lives. Universities and civil society organisations have a fundamental role to play in promoting foreign policy, especially among youth.

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